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ABSTRACT

This manual describes an approach to enhancing children's transitions into kindergarten. This approach, developed as a collaborative effort among researchers at the National Center for Early Development & Learning Kindergarten Transition Project at the University of Virginia and local school personnel, focuses on forming a network of social connections that support children and families during the transition to school. These connections include interactions between children and teachers, children and peers, and parents and teachers, as well as preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers. These social connections are important for supporting competencies in young children that can ensure their school success. A variety of transition strategies are offered that can be tailored to the individual needs of families and schools. These practices include assessment of family needs, fostering a connection between a preschool child and his or her prospective kindergarten teacher, preschool teacher contact with former students now in kindergarten, peer connections within the class and outside of school, and inter-school collaboration about programs and classroom practices. Key principles in formulating a community transition plan are then described, which form the core elements of transition practices that can be applied to individual children, families, and schools. These principles, which professionals can use in analyzing current or intended practices, are as follows: (1) foster relationships as resources; (2) promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten; (3) focus on family strengths; (4) tailor practices to individual needs; and (5) form collaborative relationships. (Contains 40 references.) (HTH)

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Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten

Linking Children, Families, & Schools

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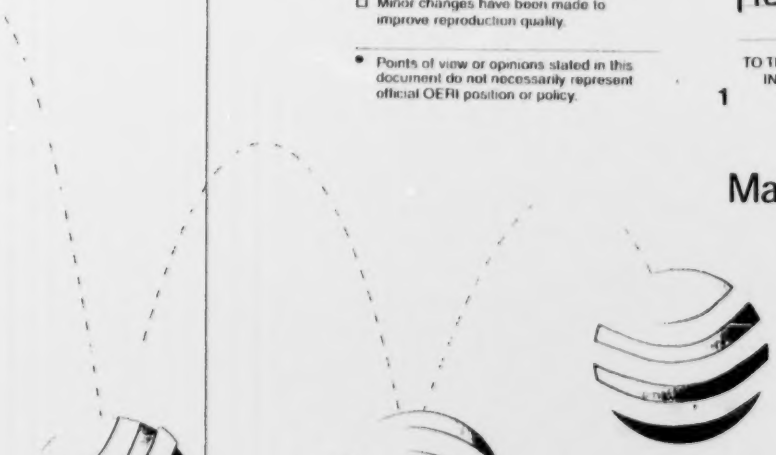

National Center for Early Development & Learning
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Table of Contents

Preface v

An Overview of the Kindergarten Transition Process 1

- Guiding Principles 2
- A Model of Transition 3

Helping Children and Families Transition into Kindergarten 5

- Planning and Implementation 5
- A Menu of Kindergarten Transition Practices 7

Applying an Approach to Kindergarten Transition in Local Schools 17

- The Collaborative Team 17
- The Implementation Process 19
- Data Gathering for Evaluation and Implementation 22

References and Resources 25

Preface

The work reported herein was under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R307A60004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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An Overview of the Kindergarten Transition Process

This manual describes an approach to enhancing children's transitions into kindergarten. This approach, developed as a collaborative effort among researchers at the National Center for Early Development & Learning Kindergarten Transition Project at the University of Virginia and local school personnel, focuses on forming a network of social connections that support children and families during the transition to school. These connections include interactions between children and teachers, children and peers, parents and teachers, as well as preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers.

These social connections are important for supporting competencies in young children that can ensure their school success. In short, these connections are resources for children. When social connections are established and maintained, children may have more positive school experiences because these resources are available. For example, if parents have positive relationships with their children's teachers, then teachers and parents can work more effectively together to support children's educational progress. Also, peer relationships that continue from children's preschool and/or neighborhood experiences into kindergarten can help ease children's transition to school by being a source of familiarity and an avenue for building social competencies. Having a familiar friend can be a source of support and comfort in this new social setting.

The approach described here systematically addresses the multiple social connections that affect children's transition to school. A variety of transition strategies are offered that can be tailored to the individual needs of families and schools. It is not a "one-size fits all" program applicable to all schools and all families. Every family's needs are different and each community has unique characteristics and constraints. On the other hand, having a framework for enhancing children's transition into kindergarten can give rise to a range of practices that educators can use in their local settings.

This manual describes this framework and the key principles in formulating a community transition plan. A menu of transition practices is provided to serve as a springboard from which communities can develop their own specific transition strategies. We will also describe our experiences in collaborating with a local community in developing and implementing this approach to kindergarten transition.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This approach to fostering successful kindergarten transitions for children, families, and schools involves a range of practices based on five guiding principles. These principles form the core elements of transition practices that can be applied to individual children, families, and schools. They are based upon extensive analysis of best practices with young children and knowledge about supporting healthy child and family development. These principles guide the implementation of the transition practices described in this manual, can be used to generate additional practices, and can inform decisions about how to adjust or tailor practices to a given situation.

1. Foster Relationships as Resources
Supportive, effective relationships are resources for children. When a child is involved in and surrounded by supportive relationships, the transition to kindergarten occurs more smoothly.

2. Promote Continuity from Preschool to Kindergarten
Fundamental to a smooth transition are relationships that serve as a bridge between the family and school and provide continuity from preschool to kindergarten. These relationships can be found among parents, teachers, family workers, other school staff, and the child's peers.

3. Focus on Family Strengths
Relationships between schools and families, reflecting the strengths of families, can be developed through supportive, positive interactions initiated by the school.

4. Tailor Practices to Individual Needs
The actual set of transition practices enacted with a given family or classroom must be based on the needs and strengths of that child, family, teacher, school and community. Thus, this approach is menu-driven and designed to be flexibly applied across a wide range of needs and strengths.

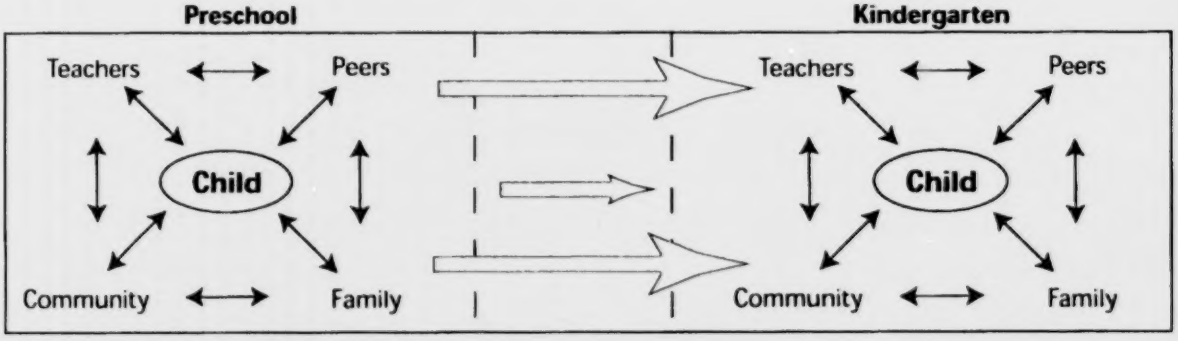
5. Form Collaborative Relationships
Collaboration among the key players in the transition process– teachers, principals, family workers, families– is fundamental in developing and implementing successful transition practices.

Professionals should use these principles in analyzing their current or intended practices. To what extent does a particular transition practice foster relationships? Does it lead to a sense of continuity and stability for the child and family moving from preschool to kindergarten? Does a practice identify or foster family strengths or, like many assessment practices, does it focus on weaknesses and risk? Another set of questions to pose addresses the context of practices. Are the same practices implemented for every family or do professionals tailor these efforts? Furthermore, do professionals work together to form their own collaborative relationships or are transition practices solely the responsibility or initiative of one group?

A MODEL OF TRANSITION

The following diagram illustrates *The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition*, described by Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (1999). This model of kindergarten transition considers the contexts and relationships that interact with each other and the child as the child transitions from preschool to kindergarten. The relationships the child has with family, teachers, peers, and their community develop over time and influence how the child will adjust in school. Further, relationships between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers, between peers, or between family and school can also support a child during this period. These connections can serve as a bridge from preschool to kindergarten and can help a child and family in this adjustment.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition



Helping Children & Families Transition into Kindergarten

Helping children and their families make the transition to kindergarten involves a careful planning process and consideration of an array of transition practices appropriate to the needs of the families, school, and community. What follows is an overview of this planning process and a menu of transition practices. This process is further exemplified in the description of the application of this framework in local schools, beginning on page 17.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Developing a community transition plan involves the following steps. All of these elements are essential to smooth implementation of transition practices. Each step in this process needs to be enacted at the district or community level, as well as at the level of individual schools, programs or neighborhoods, as portrayed below.

School & Program Transition Teams

Form a Collaborative Team

Establishing a collaborative team of preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, family workers, principals, parents, and other community representatives is critical in planning, implementing, and evaluating a community's kindergarten transition plan. This type of team is needed both at the community level and at the level of specific schools or neighborhoods. A team coordinator should be identified to facilitate the process and arrange for regular team meetings. At these meetings, the various perspectives and priorities of the programs, schools, and families involved can be considered and incorporated into the transition plan. A community partnership involving the key players can promote a cooperative process in which a realistic transition plan can be developed and implemented.

Identify a Transition Coordinator

The transition practices and plans for a given school or program should be coordinated by a school professional, who can serve as a bridge with families from the preschool to the kindergarten year. This individual might be a family worker, parent coordinator, preschool or kindergarten teacher, guidance counselor or school social worker. School systems may vary in terms of both the titles and functions of these positions. The key is that someone is designated to provide this continuity and coordinate transition activities in each school or program. In the NCEDL Kindergarten Transition Project, the preschool program's family worker served in this capacity. In any case, the coordinator establishes a relationship with each participating family and fosters the family's relationship with the preschool during the preschool year. Connections with the elementary school are then facilitated through the child's transition to kindergarten. Specific activities can be selected from the menu of transition practices geared to the family needs (see next page).

Create a Timeline

Once the team has been established, a timeline can be developed to plan when certain activities will occur. Critical in this timeline is the implementation of transition activities prior to the onset of kindergarten. In a national survey conducted by the NCEDL, nearly 3,600 kindergarten teachers responded to questions about practices they used as children transitioned to kindergarten. The most common practices were "a talk with parents after school starts," followed by "a letter to parents after the beginning of school," and "an open house after school starts." These three activities all occurred after the school year began.

Although some transition practices occur after the beginning of the school year, most of the transition activities need to be offered before kindergarten begins, and require extensive planning. Strengthening the linkages between children and their families with schools prior to the start of school can ease families' comfort levels in interacting with school and perhaps ward off problems down the road. If problems do arise, the established pattern of positive interaction may help resolve the concerns more smoothly. For example, when a family's initial school contact occurs before the start of kindergarten in a meeting with the teacher to learn about the classroom and share information about their child, a positive tone is set for future interactions. Should a concern arise later in the school year, the groundwork has been laid for effective communication. Because the parents have previously shared information with the teacher about their child's particular needs, they are more likely to feel that the teacher has greater understanding of their situation. If, on the other hand, a family's first contact with their child's teacher is a parent conference to discuss their child's behavior problems in the classroom, an entirely different relationship with school is created, and a negative frame for future interactions is more likely. Rather than problems being the foundation for the family's relationship with the school, opportunities for positive family-school interaction are an integral part of the transition process.

With a focus on starting transition activities during the preschool year, the timeline is developed to offer opportunities for families to connect with schools from preschool through the

transition into kindergarten. The following timeline provides an example of how this process might occur:

Example of Timeline for Enhancing Kindergarten Transition

Preschool		Summer	Kindergarten	
September	***April***	***June***	***August***	***September***
· Build family-school relationships · Conduct family group meetings · Foster peer relationships · Promote family participation	· Preschool & K teachers coordinate transition efforts · Determine class lists for K · Preschoolers & families visit K · Promote peer relationships outside school	· Conduct summer programs · Provide home literacy activities · Offer school playground nights · Address family transition concerns	· Offer open houses · K teachers & parents meet · Conduct K screenings	· Offer back-to-school nites · Transition coordinator fosters connections between families & K teachers

Implement Transition Practices
Once the transition coordinator has been identified and the timeline for the transition plan is established, implementation can proceed. As the transition process progresses, the strategies can be fine tuned for maximum effectiveness. The menu serves as a tool in selecting transition strategies and as a springboard for ideas for additional practices. Ongoing and regular meetings of the collaborators at various levels are necessary to ensure smooth and timely implementation.

Evaluate and Revise
The collaborative team evaluates the outcome of implementing the transition plan at both district/community and school/neighborhood levels and makes necessary adjustments and changes. This is an ongoing and dynamic process. Some strategies may work well with some families but be less effective with others. Analysis of what works and what does not can help improve the transition process.

A MENU OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES

Specific transition activities can be selected from the menu of transition practices presented below. This menu was developed in collaboration with the NCEDL Kindergarten Transition Project's team of family workers, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, parents, and principals. The team met regularly to design an approach to transition and to address issues related to staffing, timing, and the nature of the transition activities. School personnel shared ideas about their own kindergarten transition practices. Processes that enhanced transition practices were identified; barriers that hindered practices were discussed. The results of the NCEDL national survey of kindergarten teachers were also incorporated into the planning process.

The following menu is the result of this collaboration, and is designed to be used as an open-ended working document. Founded on the five guiding principles described earlier, this approach offers a variety of practices to promote the connections between children, families and schools. These include family-school relationships, child-school relationships, peer relationships, and relationships between preschool and elementary schools. For families, these practices create opportunities to connect with one another and with the school. At the child level, these practices foster preschool children's interactions with peers who will attend their kindergarten class. Preschool children also have contact with current kindergartners who help acclimate them to the kindergarten environment. Through these contacts, children also

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become acquainted with their kindergarten teacher and classroom. This process of developing connections starts in preschool level and is carried through to kindergarten.

School personnel may choose from the menu of activities and add their own ideas to the plan devised for a given family. Some activities may impact connections on a variety of levels. For example, summer playground nights for families foster family-school, child-school, and peer connections. The intensity and the number of practices implemented for each child depend on the characteristics of the child, family and school. Some families require a greater level of involvement, while others need less. This approach is individually tailored for each preschool and elementary school program, as well.

In applying the various options, school personnel are encouraged to deepen connections whenever possible. If the family has the needs and is receptive, a higher level of intervention is preferable and will more likely build positive relationships between families and schools. For example, the family assessment is best accomplished through face-to-face meetings with families rather than by phone contacts or written questionnaires. A tour of the elementary school is preferable to a note sent home to families describing the school's facilities.

Throughout this discussion, examples are given for children in preschool programs. However, the same principles are applicable to children in day care, as well. The transition coordinator or family worker is described as implementing many of the transition practices in conjunction with teachers. Again, coordination of transition activities may be done by family workers in some schools, and perhaps by a counselor or teacher in others.

A menu summary is followed by descriptions of each transition practice. This summary provides a brief overview which can be used as a tool when developing a transition plan. The complete menu can then be read for further description of the transition practices.

Kindergarten Transition Practices Menu
Summary

1. **FAMILY-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS**
   - ❑ Contact with family during first few days of preschool or kindergarten
   - ❑ Assessment of family needs
   - ❑ Periodic contact with family
   - ❑ Connecting family to community resources
   - ❑ Family participation in home-learning activities
   - ❑ Family participation in the classroom and at school events
   - ❑ Regular family meetings at school
   - ❑ Family meetings about transition issues
   - ❑ Family & preschool teacher information-sharing with kindergarten teacher about individual child
   - ❑ Newsletters/resource materials
   - ❑ Parent orientation after preschool and kindergarten start

2. **CHILD-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS**
   - ❑ Preschool child connection with kindergarten teacher
   - ❑ Preschool connection with elementary school for special school functions
   - ❑ Preschool practice of kindergarten rituals
   - ❑ Kindergarten activities incorporated from preschool
   - ❑ Preschool teacher contact with former students
   - ❑ Kindergarten support staff visit preschool children

3. **PEER CONNECTIONS**
   - ❑ Peer connections within the class
   - ❑ Peer connections outside of school
   - ❑ Peer connections with non-classmate peers who will be in kindergarten
   - ❑ Preschool peer connections with kindergarten peers
   - ❑ Group-based peer connections

4. **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**
   - ❑ Inter-school collaboration about programs and classroom practices
   - ❑ Identifying and communicating curriculum/community expectations for children
   - ❑ Inter-school connection about specific child
   - ❑ Connections with community agencies

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Family-School Connections

The relationship that the family has with their child's school is invaluable in supporting positive school outcomes. Establishing this relationship at the preschool level and encouraging these relationships as children enter school can have long-term consequences for family involvement in their children's education. Families benefit from feedback about their child and the educational services they are receiving. Equally important is the information schools receive from families. Both are essential components in maintaining a supportive connective loop between families and schools. This can be accomplished through interactions between an individual family with the teacher, transition coordinator, family worker or other school personnel, or through family involvement with the school in group activities. Formal and informal meetings with teachers and the transition coordinator for mutual information sharing are avenues to promote family connections. Other avenues include meetings with other families, classroom visits, family involvement in home-based learning activities, and volunteer activities. The following are offered as suggested practices.

❑ *Contact with family during first few days of preschool or kindergarten*

The teacher or transition coordinator contacts the family for mutual information sharing. Information from the school's perspective about how the child did the first several days of school is shared. The parent is also asked how the child and family's initial adjustment to school has been. This is accomplished via a telephone call or face-to-face contact.

❑ *Assessment of family needs*

A transition coordinator or other program/school professional assesses the family needs early in the school year (within the first two weeks of preschool and kindergarten) and follows up as needed. The purpose of this assessment is both to make initial contact with the family and to help develop a plan of family support. This is ideally accomplished through face-to-face contact, preferably by a home visit or a family school visit. Phone contact is a less preferred option, but at times may be the best alternative. This contact is coordinated with the teacher's early contact with the family and can be established during the screening process shortly before preschool or kindergarten begins. Assessments should not be duplicative, but rather help the transition coordinator establish a direct relationship with the family and determine if concerns exist.

❑ *Periodic contact with family*

The transition coordinator maintains contact with the family over the course of the preschool year, occasionally during the summer, and through the kindergarten year. Concerns are addressed as needed. For example, it might be helpful for the transition coordinator to guide families with family routines and bedtime rituals in preparation for the onset of school.

Through the transition process, each family may require a varied degree of assistance and contact. Some families may be able to negotiate the educational system quite independently. Others may have multiple needs warranting involvement. The transition coordinator helps the family to develop skills to become their own advocate as much as possible. The overall goal is eventual family-initiated involvement.

❑ *Connecting family to community resources*

Families sometimes require assistance with resource needs, behavioral consultation, or other family concerns. Referrals to services are provided as indicated. Facilitating contact with these services and incorporating pertinent recommendations into school programming help connect the family with the school.

❑ *Family participation in home-learning activities*

The teacher and transition coordinator create learning activities for home. These activities are designed so that the parents can work directly with their child. If the parents are not able to visit the school, the materials can be sent home in packets for the child to work on with their

family. These activities help promote family involvement, as well as family literacy. Over the summer months, specific projects might be designed for the family and child to work on together. The transition coordinator can facilitate these activities during home visits.

❑ *Family participation in the classroom and at school events*
Families are encouraged to become involved in the classroom and volunteer as they are able. As the end of the school year approaches, information from the elementary school kindergarten teachers or parent-teacher organizations may be shared about opportunities for volunteering in kindergarten.

❑ *Regular family meetings at school*
Regular opportunities for parents to meet with one another, have contact with the school, and discuss mutually-shared concerns provides a rhythm for family connections. Parent lunches or family nights allow families an arena to become acquainted with one other.

- Topic-specific meetings
  Topics for discussion can be identified by the parents and staff. Issues such as parenting, stress management, budgeting, and children's self esteem are possibilities. Outside speakers might address concerns, or parents might generate their own discussion. Another possibility is for parents to spend a mini-preschool day in the classroom, and to "play" being preschoolers.

- Social activities
  Informal social activities are a means of connecting families. These might occur around a holiday, such as a Thanksgiving lunch for families, or special time of year. Social activities between parents outside of school can also be fostered.

❑ *Family meetings about transition issues*
Family activities about transition issues may include:

- Meeting in the preschool year with kindergarten teachers and/or kindergarten parents
  Kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergartners meet with parents of preschool children during the preschool year to share information about the kindergarten experience and answer questions. Similarities and differences between preschool and kindergarten can be addressed. A Parent Teacher Organization representative might speak about how parents can be involved in this organization. This meeting can be incorporated into a regular parent lunch or family night at preschool. Another venue is a summer workshop for parents, or an informal dinner in conjunction with school open houses.

- Meeting at the elementary school before the onset of kindergarten
  A group meeting is held for families of preschoolers in the anticipated kindergarten classroom with the teachers to address the expectations for kindergarten and provide a tour of the elementary school. This may be incorporated into an elementary school spring orientation and/or school open house shortly prior to the onset of school. It may also be coordinated with the children's visit to the school.

❑ *Family and preschool teacher information-sharing with kindergarten teacher about individual child*
A particularly focused way to build connections between families and schools and establish common expectations for school is through a meeting including the family, kindergarten teacher, transition coordinator, and preschool teacher. In the meeting, the family and preschool

share information with the kindergarten teacher about the child. The kindergarten teacher also discusses what the parent can do at home to get their child ready for school. Information discussed includes the child's interests and preferences as she or he enters kindergarten, information about the family, as well as any parental goals and concerns about their child. This activity takes place in the late spring or summer and is preferably done in person rather than through written correspondence. This exchange can also be accomplished during a kindergarten screening prior to the beginning of kindergarten. Early in the kindergarten year the family has contact with the teacher to discuss any updated issues. This can be facilitated by the transition coordinator.

❑ *Newsletters/resource materials*
Newsletters from the school program to families provide information related specifically to transition-to-kindergarten issues. These might include information in the spring to prepare for the transition, information on parent rights and responsibilities, and summer transition packets.

❑ *Parent orientation after preschool and kindergarten start*
The school provides parents an orientation to their child's program once school begins. This is typically accomplished through back-to school nights, but might take other formats.

Child-School Connections
Introducing preschool children to kindergarten and kindergarten-related activities are ways to familiarize the child with the classroom, school environment, and their new teacher, further easing the transition process.

❑ *Preschool child connection with kindergarten teacher*
The preschool child interacts directly with their anticipated kindergarten teacher through occasional visits to the kindergarten class in the spring of the preschool year. The kindergarten teacher may visit the preschool classroom, or the contact can be incorporated into a kindergarten center-time or story-time activity. This is best accomplished when the class list can be established, at least on a tentative basis, for children identified for attendance at the elementary school. If the teacher has been identified, this contact fosters the child's familiarity with their teacher. If preliminary class lists cannot be established, then the child can still benefit from visiting a kindergarten classroom.

❑ *Preschool connection with elementary school for special school functions*
The child visits the elementary school during a special school-wide activity. Spring fairs or special entertainment-related assemblies are possible opportunities. Spring and summer kindergarten orientation programs and a chance for the child to experience their first school bus ride also help connect the child to school. An informal summer playground time in which children can visit with their peers on the playground, have a popsicle, and perhaps see their kindergarten teacher is an additional possibility. This is a low-key way children can become comfortable with school.

❑ *Preschool practice of kindergarten rituals*
Activities in preschool provide the child with information about kindergarten. Some of the rules and rituals of kindergarten are practiced during the preschool day. For example, preschoolers can practice walking in a "kindergarten line," sing songs that will be sung in kindergarten or read a special story that will be read to help familiarize the child with the kindergarten environment. These activities provide familiarity which can ease the transition process. In addition, once the kindergarten teacher is identified, the child can become acquainted with the teacher by reviewing the teacher's name and being shown their photograph. The school might develop a scrapbook of photographs from elementary school including

pictures of the teachers, principal, office staff, bus drivers, the classroom, cafeteria, playground, and other key aspects of the school. This book can be available for children's review in the preschool class.

❑ *Kindergarten activities incorporated from preschool*
Early in the kindergarten year, activities from preschool provide continuity for the child. For example, the child may read a favorite book from preschool or sing a special song. The kindergarten classroom may have similar centers to preschool and may offer a choice time for children.

❑ *Preschool teacher contact with former students*
The preschool teacher may visit or write letters to former students in the kindergarten classroom to ease the transition process.

❑ *Kindergarten support staff visit preschool children*
Guidance counselors, school social workers, or other elementary school support staff visit preschoolers who have particular needs. This contact establishes a connection between the child and elementary school before kindergarten begins. The relationship with the counselor can then be carried into the kindergarten year.

Peer Connections
The ability of children to get along with their peers is a major source of concern for kindergarten teachers as children begin school. As children move from preschool into kindergarten, connections between children and their peers help them feel more comfortable in their new environment and provide familiar peer experiences prior to the onset of school. These connections can be developed through links between preschool children and peers, both inside and outside the classroom, links with kindergarten peers and links with children not enrolled in preschool who will be in their kindergarten class.

❑ *Peer connections within the class*
Assigning a child to a class with children expected to be in the same kindergarten creates opportunities for continuity of peer connections. This can foster existing peer neighborhood connections, as well. This connection allows the preschool child to meet and play with the same age peers on a daily basis during the course of the school day. These interactions foster friendships that may carry into kindergarten. Children are able to practice new behaviors, and experience social problem-solving and emotion regulation in a new way. If indicated, the transition coordinator can assist the teacher in the class to promote peer relationships.

❑ *Peer connections outside of school*
Peer connections outside of school are fostered with preschool friends. The transition coordinator or teacher may help the family to arrange visits with school friends in the afternoon, weekends, or during the summer. Summertime presents a special challenge to sustaining connections for children. Continuity of contact during the summer helps carry existing peer relationships forward into the following school year. These connections can be beneficial to families, as well as for the children.

❑ *Peer connections with non-classmate peers who will be in kindergarten*
Opportunities may be provided for the preschool child to meet and play with a child who is not in the same preschool program, who will be in the same kindergarten class. Building the natural linkages that exist for children in their neighborhood and community helps the transition process. Programs over the summer, such as pre-kindergarten camps, are one such opportunity. These programs offer children a chance to interact with peers who will be in their class. In addition to promoting peer connections, familiarity with the elementary school and kindergarten teachers is achieved.

❑ *Preschool peer connections with kindergarten peers*
A connection with current kindergarten children offers the preschool child an opportunity to learn "the ropes" of kindergarten and provides a bridge for the children between the programs. The kindergarten children serve as mentors to the preschool children. This connection is accomplished in a variety of ways. The children from the two programs can interact informally or specific "buddies" can be identified for one-to-one interaction. Kindergartners may visit the preschool, the preschooler may visit the kindergarten, or there may be a combination of the two. This connection can be established in the spring of the preschool year.

- Kindergartners visit preschool
  Preschool children benefit from visits from kindergarten children, generally done in conjunction with a visit from the kindergarten teacher. The kindergartners can describe their experiences and answer questions from the preschool children.

- Preschoolers visit kindergarten class
  Interaction with elementary-age children is promoted during visits to the kindergarten classroom. During these visits, the kindergarten "buddy" might read a story to the preschooler, demonstrate how to play a game, show the younger child how to use the classroom computer, or interact informally on the playground. Preschool children may also eat lunch in the cafeteria with the kindergarten class. Joint field trips between the preschool and kindergarten class provide an additional means to connect children with kindergarten-age peers.

- Summer school inclusion of rising kindergartners
  A summer school program where rising kindergartners can interact with rising first graders also allows for peer interaction between the younger children with older, experienced peers.

❑ *Group-based peer connections*
Activity-based social skills groups (generally conducted in kindergarten) can foster peer relationships. These groups are generally run with a small group of children outside the classroom.

Community Connections
In addition to family-school, child-school, and peer connections, connections at the broader community level between schools and other agencies serve a critical role in the transition process. These community linkages across programs help ensure continuity for children. Transition is supported when kindergarten and preschools meet together to identify goals for children. When the preschool program is housed in the elementary school, coordination needs to occur within the school. The challenge becomes greater when children attend a preschool or daycare program independent from the elementary school or have no pre-kindergarten school experience. These situations require careful coordination among the programs. Effective transition experiences, therefore, are not only influenced by the relationships teachers and other school personnel have with families, but by broader school and agency policy, as well. Ongoing collaboration among professionals is fundamental in the development and implementation of transition practices.

❑ *Inter-school collaboration about programs and classroom practices*
- School policy coordination
  Staff from preschool and the elementary school collaborate on placement, screening and registration practices. For example, coordination between preschool programs and elementary schools to keep children who attend preschool together in kindergar-

ten helps maintain the ties between children and families as they transition to elementary school. Another placement consideration is arranging for a child to have the same kindergarten teacher as his or her older sibling. This can help build upon family-school connections. Generating class lists in the spring, rather than just prior to the beginning of school, can facilitate preschoolers' earlier connections with their kindergarten teacher.

These decisions can create challenges for school administrators in balancing the promotion of transition practices with competing demands. For example, balancing classrooms for gender, ethnicity, and achievement levels remain important considerations in placement decisions, even in the face of the need to foster peer and family connections.

- Classroom practices discussion
  The preschool teacher, kindergarten teacher and transition coordinator meet and discuss their programs and familiarize one another about their classroom practices, traditions, and rituals. Certain activities might be incorporated into the preschool classroom (see page 12, Preschool practice of kindgergarten rituals & Kindergarten activities incorporated from preschool, for examples). Preschool teacher visits to kindergarten, as well as kindergarten teacher visits to preschool, also help educators understand each other's programs. Principals, resource teachers, and counselors can participate in this process, as well.

❑ *Identifying and communicating curriculum/community expectations for children*
Preschools and kindergarten programs identify and state clear expectations for children's performance, and then work together to ensure children have the opportunity to be taught the skills that meet these expectations. Defining a set or progression of skills from ages three to six and then communicating about this with the community in language families can understand helps to create a "skill link" from preschool to kindergarten.

❑ *Inter-school connection about a specific child*
The preschool teacher, kindergarten teacher, and transition coordinator communicate about the individual child's needs as she/he transitions to kindergarten. If concerns exist, these are addressed in terms of effective strategies to manage the behavior rather than on negative aspects of the child.

❑ *Connections with community agencies*

- Inter-agency policy coordination
  Community agencies serving young children coordinate services with schools to foster a smooth transition to kindergarten. Clarity of roles and responsibilities is established.

- Child-specific coordination
  Continuity among services is maintained through coordination with significant community agencies as the child transitions to school. When the transition coordinator has worked closely with a social service, healthcare, or mental health agency while the child has attended preschool, services are coordinated as the child enters kindergarten. This is done with parental consent to share information.

Applying an Approach to Kindergarten Transition in Local Schools

The NCEDL Kindergarten Transition Project field tested and implemented this approach to kindergarten transition in local schools in the Charlottesville, VA area in 1998- 2000. The implementation process is described below to give a sense of how this approach has evolved in one particular location. This approach can be applied to other communities and specifically tailored to the given needs of the schools and families involved. As the transition practices were implemented, research was conducted to describe and evaluate this approach. The research component of the project is described on page 22.

The project began in Fall 1998, as 110 children entered two four-year-old preschool programs and continued through their kindergarten year. Children were eligible for the preschool programs based on developmental, behavioral, health or financial needs. One preschool program consisted of six classrooms. In this program, children were assigned to classes based on the elementary school they were expected to attend in order to establish neighborhood connections. The second program had four classes at four separate elementary schools. Children in this program resided in the school catchment, so that they attended preschool in the same school in which they were anticipated to attend kindergarten. There were ten participating preschool teachers, seven family workers, and 37 kindergarten teachers at twelve elementary schools.

All of the families of children enrolled in the ten participating preschool classrooms were offered the opportunity to participate in the project. Parents whose children attended the preschool programs who did not consent to the research component of the project received the same level of services they typically would receive. The families of these children were encouraged to participate as usually expected by the program.

THE COLLABORATIVE TEAM

The NCEDL Kindergarten Transition Project was developed as a partnership with local schools. A collaborative team, composed of family workers, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, principals, parents, and NCEDL researchers was established nearly a year before intervention with families and schools took place. Members of this team met monthly to identify community needs related to the transition to kindergarten, develop the menu-based approach, and oversee the implementation process. Discussions focused on existing transition practices, ideal practices, and barriers to these practices. Through this collaboration, the team formulated programmatic changes to apply within their own program or school. Each program or school then implemented various transition practices geared to the specific needs of the families and schools. In addition to families, teachers, and principals, the following played key roles in the transition process:

Transition Coordinators/ Family Workers

In general, the family workers employed at the preschool programs coordinated the transition plan from preschool through the kindergarten year for each family they served, in contrast to hiring university employees as interveners. The family worker's role involved engaging families in positive relationships with school, conducting regular home visits, connecting families to community resources, and providing opportunities for involvement in parent groups in preschool. Family worker familiarity with the program and families created a greater level of sensitivity and relevance in the development and implementation of transition practices.

At the four preschool programs housed within the elementary schools, the family workers continued to follow the same families through elementary school. Continuity was quite easy to maintain in these schools. At the preschool program with six different classrooms, several individuals served the role as family worker. They made connections with the participating elementary schools and continued to follow the same children and their families into kindergarten. For the largest group of children, the preschool's family worker served as the family worker. In addition to her role as family worker for the preschool program as a whole, she followed specific children participating in the project more intensively. For a second group of children, a former teacher at one of the participating elementary schools followed children at preschool who were anticipated to attend the elementary school where she previously taught. Her links to that school enabled her to make the connections between families and the school more easily. For a third group, the project coordinator followed families expected to attend one of the participating elementary schools. Thus, the approach was implemented in a variety of ways in different contexts due to local constraints, yet in each case, the five guiding principles were used to inform decisions and practices.

Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator served as leader of the collaborative team, oversaw data collection, worked with schools in the implementation process, and maintained a caseload of families participating in the project. By organizing regular team discussions, the group developed a heightened awareness of transition concerns, which led to a spontaneous process in creating valuable transition practices. Data collection involved developing the instruments with the team, who helped promote their cultural relevancy to the population served and sensitivity to families needs. Management of the collection of questionnaires and interviews, and monitoring changes in residences and schools of the families were other aspects of the coordinators's role.

The project coordinator's clinical background in social work provided her skills in coordinating the team efforts, as well as in working directly with families. Serving dual roles as researcher and family worker helped foster more realistic implementation of the transition practices. For example, one goal of the project was to encourage family involvement. Meeting this goal in the context of working with families faced with tremendous economic and social hardships was often challenging. It was, therefore, essential to provide a variety of both formal and informal ways for families to participate with schools. Some families responded to structured orientations, some to low-key social events, some to events during the day, and some to evening functions. Because the project coordinator worked directly with families, consulted with other family workers, and coordinated the research component of the project, a more comprehensive and practical approach to transition emerged.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Ongoing Collaboration

Throughout the implementation process, ongoing collaborative team meetings were held to discuss the transition process as it unfolded. The project coordinator and transition coordinators met regularly to share ideas about transition practices in their individual programs. Transition coordinators met with preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers and principals to coordinate transition activities tailored to the children's and schools' needs. Parents collaborated with transition coordinators and teachers about the transition activities in which they participated.

Some comments from participants:

- One family worker stated, "Information about curriculum, children, and kindergarten placement is discussed among preschool and kindergarten staff. Teachers are very supportive of this process and have developed good relationships."

- One principal reported, "Participation in the transition project enabled me to enter a dialogue with researchers and other practitioners on an important topic that is often ignored."

- One family worker said, "The partnership with the Kindergarten Transition Project provided professional stimulation and a sense of direction in my work."

In addition to ongoing collaboration, particular activities which fostered the transition process occurred during the course of the preschool and kindergarten year. These are described below.

Fall Preschool Year

In fall of the preschool year, as the participating child entered preschool, the family worker met the family. The family worker focused on building a relationship with the family, providing support, and linking the family with the teacher and school. An assessment of the child's and family's needs was done by the family worker early in the school year. This assessment was generally conducted through a home visit. If this was not possible, an assessment at school or at the parent's work were options.

- One family worker reported that the home visits "opened the doors for communication since the focus was on the children and not adult failures."

The family worker met with the family to identify family concerns and referred the family to appropriate community agencies, as indicated. The family worker or teacher contacted the family to share their perspective of the child's initial adjustment to school over the first few days and asked how the family felt the child's initial adjustment had been. Ongoing parent involvement was encouraged through regular parent meetings coordinated by the family worker. Programs also offered opportunities for parents to become involved in learning activities at home. In addition to family involvement, the teacher, through the normal course of the preschool day, fostered peer interaction in the classroom among children expected to attend the same kindergarten.

Spring Preschool Year

In the spring, the family worker continued to facilitate regular family contact with the preschool. At this time, the family worker also began to establish the linkages with the anticipated kindergarten. When possible, the child's kindergarten teacher was identified at this time. For some children, certain factors caused this decision to be made in late summer. Recognizing this, the child had general exposure to kindergarten until the actual kindergarten teacher

was determined. Once the kindergarten teacher was identified, relationships with this teacher were promoted.

Connections were expanded on a number of levels. Connections for the child with preschool peers were supplemented by connections with kindergarten peers. The preschool child was also connected with his/her anticipated kindergarten teacher and school. Preschool and kindergarten staff met, and the family developed connections with the kindergarten teacher.

In terms of child linkages, familiarity with kindergarten was gained through opportunities for the preschooler to interact with current kindergarten children and with their anticipated kindergarten teacher. These connections occurred in the preschool classroom, as well as through experiences in the kindergarten classroom. Kindergarten children shared their experiences with the preschool children and were paired with preschoolers during classroom visits to read a story, play a game or demonstrate use of the class computer.

Participants' comments included the following:

- One child said, "I get to go visit my new big school today!"
- One mother stated, "It really helped to see the school and kindergarten classroom so that I know what to expect. My son loved visiting the playground."
- One preschool teacher remarked, "It's been great having the children spend time in the kindergarten classroom. Preschool children talk about what the kids say a lot."
- One kindergarten teacher said, "Visiting the kindergarten class helps the preschoolers become more comfortable with a new class and teacher."
- One principal said, "Spending time in kindergarten minimizes anxiety for preschool children."

In early spring, the family worker and preschool teacher met with the kindergarten teacher about their programs to familiarize each other about their classroom practices. Specific kindergarten activities or rituals, such as walking in a "kindergarten line," reading a special story or singing a particular song, were identified. These activities were practiced in preschool. Also, the preschool program shared activities from their program with the kindergarten teacher that could serve as a bridge of familiarity for the child when she/he entered kindergarten. Singing a familiar song or reading a favorite story from preschool helped ease the transition. As summer approached, some preschool staff discussed skill-based literacy materials with the kindergarten teacher that family could use in the summer at home.

The family worker collaborated with the family about the transition process. The family was approached as a partner in the process, an expert in their own right, on their child's abilities and needs. The discussion focused on expectations for kindergarten, and the family's goals and concerns about their child. This meeting laid the groundwork for a conference later in the spring with the parent, kindergarten teacher, preschool teacher, and family worker.

The family had opportunities to meet as a group and individually with the anticipated kindergarten teacher in late spring. A group meeting with the kindergarten teacher via a spring orientation helped familiarize families with the expectations for kindergarten. If the teacher had not yet been identified, then a meeting with a kindergarten teacher in the spring was followed by a meeting with the actual teacher at the school open house shortly prior to the opening of school. When possible, the family had an opportunity to meet with the kindergarten teacher, along with the preschool teacher and family worker, specifically about their child.

At this meeting, the family shared information with the kindergarten teacher about their child's interests and preferences, as well as any concerns. The preschool teacher shared information about his/her experiences with the child. The kindergarten teacher in conjunction with the other participants discussed how these issues might be addressed in the kindergarten year.

Summer before Kindergarten

In the summer before kindergarten, the family worker checked in with the child and family and addressed transition issues. If indicated, the family worker facilitated social opportunities with peers or encouraged visits to the school playground to increase familiarity with the new setting. For example, one program offered a playground "popsicle" night for the rising kindergartners and their families. This low-key activity enabled the families to experience school in an enjoyable and relaxed manner. In addition, the family worker provided home visits to support school adjustment through literacy activities and help with establishing family routines, such as bedtime and awakening rituals. If the elementary school had an orientation during the summer, the family worker facilitated family participation.

Fall Kindergarten Year

In the fall of kindergarten, as the child entered kindergarten, the family worker served as a bridge for the family into school and as a resource to the kindergarten teacher. The worker continued to encourage family involvement and monitor family adjustment. In the first two weeks of kindergarten, the family worker followed up with the family to see how the child and family adjusted to kindergarten. This contact was either face-to-face or by phone. The family worker also checked in with the kindergarten teacher early in the school year to determine if there were concerns warranting attention. If a meeting had not yet occurred between the family and kindergarten teacher, this connection was established. At this time, the family shared information about their child which helped establish a positive tone to the relationship. As in preschool, the family worker was available to address family concerns and act as a liaison between the parent and teacher. The family worker worked closely with the teacher, school guidance counselor, and other staff, to coordinate their individual roles.

As the kindergarten year progressed, the family worker maintained regular contact with the family and teacher and fostered the connections for the child as needed. Many families were quite independent and self-sufficient in their relationships with the schools. These families required minimal intervention. Others required some assistance in negotiating the education system. Because families had opportunities for ongoing involvement with the school- starting in preschool and continuing into kindergarten- they became increasingly comfortable with the school. This led to a reduced need for family worker involvement. Families were encouraged to take more responsibility for negotiating their relationships with their child's school, thereby allowing the family worker to gradually taper her involvement.

DATA GATHERING FOR EVALUATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Data were gathered as the NCEDL Kindergarten Transition Project was implemented in order to describe and evaluate the transition process from all of the key participants' perspectives. The research goals, like the transition practices themselves, were developed in conjunction with the collaborative team. This team reviewed data instruments and was directly involved in the data collection. The instruments listed below are by no means essential for implementation of this approach to kindergarten transition. They are optional evaluative tools a particular community or school may choose to incorporate into their transition plan.

The instruments developed by NCEDL are available in a supplement to this manual on request. All other instruments may be directly requested from their authors. The NCEDL instruments include:

- *The Kindergarten Transition Project Parent Interviews* were conducted by family workers and serve dual purpose of engaging families in relationships with schools and gathering information about family experiences in schools and at home. Interviews focus on parents' descriptions of literacy activities, child behavior, rules and routines in preparing for school, social supports networks, family relationships with schools, peer contact outside of school, and parent coping.

- *The Family-School Contact Log* was completed by teachers and family workers to record their contacts with families using a daily-diary method.

- *The Transition Practices Menu Checklist* documented the use of transition practices throughout the course of preschool and summer.

- *The Elementary School Personnel Contact Log* was completed by the family workers during the kindergarten year to track the contact maintained with elementary school personnel.

- *The Transition to Kindergarten Activities Questionnaires* identified participants' experiences with various transition activities.

- *The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale* assessed teachers' perceptions of their relationships with a particular student.

- *The Kindergarten Transition Project Debriefing Interview* was designed to elicit participant's impressions of the transition process and their experiences collaborating with the NCEDL.

These instruments and those developed by other sources are cited in the following table. Data measures developed by the project staff are noted by *.

INSTRUMENT	WHEN CONDUCTED	WHO PARTICIPATED	SOURCE OF INSTRUMENT
Kindergarten Transition Project Parent Interviews*	Preschool: Fall, Winter & Spring; Kindergarten: Fall and Winter	Parent/guardian	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia) Adapted, in part, from sources noted below (see**)
Family-School Contact Log*	Preschool & Kindergarten on a continuous basis; Summer (family workers only)	Preschool & kindergarten teachers, family workers	Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Transition Practices Menu Checklist*	Preschool & Summer on weekly basis	Family workers	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Elementary School Personnel Contact Log*	Kindergarten	Family workers	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Transition to Kindergarten Activities Questionnaires*	Preschool: Spring Kindergarten: Fall	Preschool & kindergarten teachers, family workers, principals	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Student-Teacher Relationship Scale*	Preschool: Spring Kindergarten: Fall	Preschool & kindergarten teachers	Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Kindergarten Transition Project Debriefing Interview*	Kindergarten: Spring	Kindergarten teachers, family workers	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Demographics (gender, ethnicity, free-reduced lunch status)	Preschool: Fall	School records	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Demographics (gender, ethnicity, education, experience)	Preschool: Winter Kindergarten: Fall	Preschool & kindergarten teachers, family workers	Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (NCEDL, University of Virginia)
Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS)	Preschool: Winter, Spring Kindergarten: Fall	Preschool & kindergarten teachers	Hightower, et. al. (University of Rochester)
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS)—Teacher Questionnaire	Preschool: Spring Kindergarten: Fall	Preschool & kindergarten teachers	Items from ECLS Nicholson, Atkins-Burnet, & Meisels (University of Michigan)
Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale	Kindergarten: Fall	Kindergarten teachers	Items from the ***Teacher Self-efficacy Scale,*** Bandura, (Stanford University)
Stanford Binet subtests (bead memory and vocabulary)	Preschool: Fall	Children	Items from ***Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale***

** ***Kindergarten Transition Parent Interview,*** adapted from the following:

1. ***Family Literacy Interview,*** Wasik, (NCEDL, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
2. ***Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey: Parent Interview,*** Bryant, et. al. (NCEDL, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
3. ***Home Situation Questionnaire,*** Barkley, Guilford Press.
4. ***Inventory of Peer Contact—Part A ,*** Pianta & Dell, (NICHD Study of Early Child Care, University of Virginia).
5. ***Open-ended questions about families,*** Wasik, (NCEDL, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
6. ***Parent Attitudes and Behaviors Survey,*** Taylor & Rowley, (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

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